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State Dept. Denies Visa Extension, Keeping Russian From TV Debate

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WASHINGTON, April 1 — The Reagan Administration has denied a visa extension to the Soviet Union's leading expert on the United States to keep him from participating in a televised debate, State Department officials said today.

The officials said that the decision, cleared with Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig Jr., was made yesterday in response to Moscow's refusal to allow American representatives to appear on Soviet television.

'Bill Moyers' Journal' at Issue

The Soviet official, Georgi A. Arbatov, who is head of the Institute of United States and Canadian Studies and a member of the Communist Party's policy-making Central Committee, has been in the United States since March 25 on a visa that expires next Sunday.

He had applied for an extension so that he and two other Soviet public figures could appear in a Soviet-American debate on April 10 on the "Bill Moyers' Journal" program over the Public Broadcasting Service.

Yesterday, the Soviet Embassy and Mr. Moyers were informed by the State Department of the decision not to renew Mr. Arbatov's visa.

Mr. Arbatov, reached by phone in Atlanta where he was speaking to a foreign policy group, said the whole affair was "ridiculous."

"I didn't want to impose myself on anyone," he said. "I didn't invite myself to Bill Moyers's show. Now I will understand a bit more about the policies of the new Administration than I knew before."

He said that he had wanted to avoid overexposure on this trip and had declined invitations to such network programs as "Issues and Answers" produced by ABC News, "Face the Na-

tion" by CBS News and "Today" by NBC News.

It was not clear, Mr. Arbatov said, whether the Moyers show would now go on. According to a Soviet Embassy official, the State Department said two other participants who were still in Moscow could still come, but it was uncertain whether they would.

The three Americans who were to take part in the program are: Senator Sam Nunn, Democrat of Georgia; William G. Hyland, a specialist on the Soviet Union formerly employed by the Central Intelligence Agency and later by the State Department and the National Security Council; and Strobe Talbott, diplomatic correspondent for Time magazine.

Mr. Moyers said that he had been in touch with officials in the State Department for several weeks about the planned debate and that the decision to prevent Mr. Arbatov from appearing "can only confirm my impression that they want to keep this debate off the air."

'Third-Rate and Paranoid'

"It is a petty action that results in senior American officials acting as if they were bureaucrats in a third-rate, paranoid, totalitarian country," he said. "Of course, the Soviets don't allow Americans to run around their country meeting the public and press. They are a closed society intolerant of any opinion except the official view of reality."

He said that a senior State Department official had told him that "they simply want to get Arbatov out of this country because he's been receiving so much coverage for his views."

"I replied that the department was cutting off its nose to spite its face because this was the one event in Arbatov's visit in which he would be challenged by three authoritative and knowledgeable Americans who are not afraid to stand up to Soviet propaganda," Mr. Moyers said.

"In these dangerous times both sides should welcome every opportunity to air our differences," he added. "Unfortunately the mentality of the 1950's is loose in the State Department today, a mentality that leads us to act like our adversaries instead of like Americans."

A producer for Mr. Moyers said that it was uncertain what would now happen. There is consideration, she said, to having the Soviet participants debate by satellite from Moscow.

On the Soviet side, Mr. Arbatov was to be joined by Mikhail A. Milshstein, a retired general who is an arms control expert in Mr. Arbatov's institute, and Vitaly I. Kobyshev, a journalist who is on the staff of the International Information Department in the Central Committee.

State Department Gives Reason

A State Department spokesman, in giving the reason for refusing to extend Mr. Arbatov's visa, said:

"Soviet officials, including Dr. Arbatov, have made frequent appearances on American television in recent weeks. Americans have no access to Soviet television or other Soviet media. Our embassy in Moscow has repeatedly asked that our chargé d'affaires, Jack F. Matlock Jr., be allowed to appear on Soviet television. But so far without success."

"Given the lack of reciprocity, we consider it inappropriate to grant the visa extension to Dr. Arbatov solely for the sake of another television appearance."

Another State Department official said Soviet officials had made at least 13 television appearances in the United States in recent weeks.

The news of the refusal to extend Mr. Arbatov's visa came as Ambassador Anatoly F. Dobrynin met with Mr. Haig for the second time in a week on overall relations. It was not known whether the Arbatov matter was raised.

In another reciprocity gesture, Mr. Dobrynin was barred by the Reagan Administration from having his limousine drive into the State Department garage, a practice permitted him in the past but not to other ambassadors who arrived for appointments. Mr. Dobrynin arrived today at the regular diplomatic entrance.